

JODH SINGH

THE *GHADAR* MOVEMENT
AND THE ANTI-COLONIAL
DEVIANT IN THE
ANGLO-AMERICAN IMAGINATION

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In the 1939 film *Charlie Chan at Treasure Island* — part of a series of Hollywood films from the 1920s depicting the adventures of the Chinese detective Charlie Chan, featuring white American actors carefully squinting their eyes and interspersing cod philosophy with less amusing malapropisms — Sidney Toler's Charlie is forced to investigate a murder in San Francisco and its connection to the suspicious character 'Dr Zodiac'. Zodiac is presented as a psychic from the 'East': unnaturally tall and broad-shouldered, bearded and wearing a turban, surrounded by Persian relics and introduced as 'the Eye of Allah-Mata'.¹ The confusing medley of Oriental iconography is revealed, even in the film, to be a fraud. The ghostly presences in Zodiac's seances are shown to be elaborate mechanical props and his appearance a mask — his 'face [is] rubber, beard false, massive body an illusion, elaborate disguise indicate Dr Zodiac two other people [sic]'.² He is revealed to be part of a network of fake psychics across the United States, organized so as to obtain embarrassing secrets from the rich and powerful that could be used for blackmail and, it is hinted, to extort sexual favours. It is no accident that Cesar Romero's 'Fred Rhadini' chooses the elaborate costume of Zodiac to disguise his crimes in the film. Zodiac's costume and activities were designed to chime with still extant anxieties about the presence of Indian migrants on the Pacific Coast of North America and of their peculiar political activities some two decades earlier.

These anxieties were present in a district courtroom in Oakland in California on 12 March 1918. On that date, a committee of

* This article has benefitted from far too many people to list in a footnote. I will limit my thanks to Kama Maclean, Martin Thomas and Kim Wagner for commenting on earlier drafts, Sukhmeet Singh for helping me to peer into the worlds of psychiatric diagnoses, and Annalisa Urbano for being totally awesome.

¹ Norman Foster (dir.), *Charlie Chan at Treasure Island* (20th Century Fox, 1939).

² *Ibid.*

jurists and medical experts declared that Jodh Singh, a Punjabi migrant, a Sikh and a revolutionary, was legally insane. The news came as a relief to John White Preston, the United States Attorney for the Northern District of California, an individual who had been charged with prosecuting thirty-five individuals³ in what, by March 1918, had become the longest and the most expensive trial ever held in the United States. It was the prosecution of men, exclusively men,⁴ for their association and involvement in the Ghadar (lit. 'Mutiny' or 'Rebellion') Party, a trial which the US press of the day sensationally, and somewhat inaccurately,⁵ labelled the 'Hindu-German Conspiracy Trial'.

A world-wide conspiracy, which involved hundreds, including the famous poet Tagore, Japanese statesmen and Chinese mandarins, Russian bolsheviks and American reds, in plans for an uprising in Tibet, bomb explosions in New York and California, and an armed expedition to India from our Pacific coast!⁶

The length and expense of the trial, which began on 20 November 1917, were the reasons for Jodh Singh's presence in California. Preston was under increasing pressure from the US State Department and British Intelligence to bring the case to a successful conclusion. Jodh Singh had provided evidence that had earlier been used in a series of prosecutions of members of the Ghadar Party in South and Southeast Asia and it was thus assumed that he could fulfil the same function in the United States by acting as state's witness. Jodh Singh, however, refused to perform the role cast for him. After being secreted back into the United States for his appearance in the 'Hindu-German Conspiracy Case' on 27 November 1917, Jodh failed to give the evidence required⁷ and instead made a statement attacking the prosecution:

³ Seventeen Indians and eighteen American and German citizens. The original list of indictments was substantially larger but many accused were not apprehended or escaped prosecution by giving evidence for the prosecution.

⁴ A number of American women were involved in the extended network of Indian revolutionaries in North America, but there was marked reluctance to prosecute these individuals.

⁵ Indians were labelled 'Hindu', 'Hindoo' or 'East Indian' in the official racial profiling in the United States of America and Canada. The term 'Hindu' was also partly self-referential, stemming from a time when the term itself was broader than its contemporary narrow and purely religious definition.

⁶ Thomas M. Johnson, 'Secrets of the Master Spies', *Popular Mechanics Magazine*, lviii (1932), 409.

⁷ After his initial demand for pledges of leniency for the defendants was denied, Maia Ramnath, *From Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley, Calif., 2011).

Gentlemen, this is the United States of America. This is a country where democratic government was established by one of the Mahatmas of the world who is known as George Washington. This is the country where men of high and low class have almost equal rights . . .

Until now I have not understood what right has the Government of the United States to bring me to this country as a prisoner without issuing any legal warrant against me, either in India or the United States, and then expect testimony in this world-wide intrigue.⁸

Jodh went on further. He requested that the judge allow him to change his plea and that he be allowed to stand trial 'with my brothers'.⁹ Jodh Singh's request was denied.¹⁰ He was imprisoned and, while in gaol, suffered a psychotic breakdown. What followed were three weeks of psychiatric evaluation before the judgment on Jodh Singh's insanity was made. It was adjudged that the racial failings of all Indians had caused Jodh's madness. Indians were 'natural' or racial sexual degenerates, and Jodh Singh's particular vice was that he was 'naturally' or racially 'of the homosexual type'.¹¹ Jodh Singh was confined to an asylum, and the 'Hindu-German Conspiracy Trial' was allowed to continue uninterrupted.

The purpose of this article is to explore the ease by which Jodh Singh could be constructed as the site of absolute moral decay in California — 'naturally of the homosexual type'. Jodh existed as a chimera of the wider transnational anxieties caused by transient Indian migrants across the Pacific and fears of their peculiar political activities. Understanding Britain's Empire as caught in a state of perpetual anxiety in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has become commonplace in histories of Britain's many imperial peripheries and their many crises. This is particularly so in analyses of British imperialism in India. Forty

⁸ 'Bomb Plots', *Evening Post* (New York), 30 Jan. 1918, 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ According to Sohan Singh Josh, Jodh, in addition, wanted 'a guarantee from the judge and the prosecuting counsel that he would be freed and allowed to stay on in India and not kept in detention under lock and key' before he would consent to testify. Sohan Singh Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History*, Vol. 2 (Delhi, 1978), 80.

¹¹ 'Report of Commission Appointed February Twentieth, Nineteen Hundred and Eighteen, by the Honorable William C. Van Fleet, United States District Judge (United States District Court for the Northern District of California), to Inquire [sic] into the Mental Condition of Jodh Singh, a United States Prisoner'. RG 118, Records of the Office of the US Attorney, Northern District of California, Neutrality Case Files, 1913–20. Hindu-German Conspiracy, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, Calif., Box 5, Folder 1(a).

years of scholarship, from the early work of Ranajit Guha and through the volumes of *Subaltern Studies* in the 1980s and 1990s, have altered the ways in which everyday imperial thought and imperial governance have been understood.¹² The British Raj is no longer to be analysed as hegemonic and unchallenged but, rather, in a state of perpetual anxiety, discontent and rebellion. But while this is true in histories of particular regions and localities, it remains absent from synthetic accounts of British imperialism still clinging to analyses of it as stable and consistent with only the odd chapter, parentheses or footnote mentioning those moments of disorder.¹³ The everyday anxieties that shaped particular imperial spaces are still absent in general and transnational histories of Empire — histories that, in the temperate words of John Mackenzie, are ‘separate from their component parts’ and in which any references to the non-white subjects of Empire are ‘relatively slight’.¹⁴ This absence is even more apparent in the case of imperial migrants: particularly the thirty million South Asian migrants who left South Asia between 1834 and 1960 and the much smaller number, in the tens of thousands, who journeyed across the Pacific. These trans-Pacific migrants are rarely the subjects of transnational histories but are instead confined to national narratives of the development of official policies of racial exclusion in North America¹⁵ or their role in the creation of new coercive measures in India during and after the First World

¹² Beginning with Ranajit Guha, ‘Neel Durpan: The Image of a Peasant Revolt in a Liberal Mirror’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, ii (1974); *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1983); and ‘The Prose of Counter-Insurgency’, in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi, 1983).

¹³ See Bernard Porter, *The Lion’s Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850–1983* (London, 1975); John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400–2000* (London, 2008); John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830–1970* (Cambridge, 2009); and John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (London, 2012).

¹⁴ John M. Mackenzie, ‘The British Empire: Ramshackle or Rampaging? A Historiographical Reflection’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xliii (2015), 100.

¹⁵ See Sangay K. Mishra, *Desis Divided: The Political Lives of South Asian Americans* (Minneapolis, 2016); Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley, Calif., 2011); Seema Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance and Indian Anticolonialism in North America* (Oxford, 2014); W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Towards Orientals in British Columbia* (Kingston, Ont., 2002); Hugh Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada’s Colour Bar* (Delhi, 1979); Hugh J.

(cont. on p. 5)

War.¹⁶ The few attempts that have been made to write transnational histories of imperial migration and the anxieties that migrated with them, most recently by Antoinette Burton, have struggled to divorce the lived experiences of migrants from the fevered imaginings contained in intelligence reports or case files. The Ghadar Party is used by Burton as an illustrative example but its origins are said to lie in theseamless connection between Indian and Irish revolutionary activity before the First World War; it is purported to have had its greatest success in wartime mutinies among Indian soldiers and it is hailed as the antecedent for later Punjabi and North Indian political radicalism in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁷ In Burton's work the depiction of Ghadar is not wholly wrong but it becomes an exaggerated caricature of itself. Interactions between Indian and Irish revolutionaries were limited to shared printing presses at the offices of the *Gaelic American* in New York and introductions to German Intelligence in the early weeks of the First World War. There were mutinies that were related to Ghadar but the Singapore Mutiny of February 1915, which Burton states as Ghadar's greatest success, was not one of them.¹⁸ Finally, Ghadar was equally important to the development of a politico-religious right as it was to the political left.¹⁹ The tendency has been to unconsciously replicate the

(n. 15 cont.)

M. Johnston, *Jewels of the Qila: The Remarkable Story of an Indo-Canadian Family* (Vancouver, BC, 2011).

¹⁶ Kim Wagner, "'Calculated to Strike Terror': The Amritsar Massacre and the Spectacle of Colonial Violence', *Past and Present*, no. 233 (Nov. 2016).

¹⁷ Antoinette Burton, *The Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism* (Oxford, 2015), 190–7.

¹⁸ The official report into the Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry was forced to admit that there was 'no direct proof' that any Indian civilians in Singapore had 'promoted fanatical unrest and general disaffection'. *Report in Connection with the Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry at Singapore* (1915), India Office Records, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, London (hereafter BL), L/MIL/17/19/48. The last prosecution of Ghadaris in British India, in the Mandalay Conspiracy Case from March to July 1917, further reveals that the one Ghadar activist in Singapore, Mul Chand, was taken by surprise by the Mutiny and a handful of others only arrived in the city 'to preach sedition and stir up mutiny there whither they went arriving shortly after the local mutiny had already been suppressed'. The Mandalay Conspiracy Case, India Office Records, Asia and Africa Collection, BL, L/PJ/6/1458, File 3968. See also Sho Kuwajima, *The Mutiny in Singapore: War, Anti-War and the War for India's Independence* (New Delhi, 2006), and Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy* (London, 2014).

¹⁹ From Sikh religious revivalist movements to the nascent politics of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar imprisoned in the Andaman Islands.

assumptions found in the translations and summaries of British intelligence officers or US attorneys even when trying to do the opposite.²⁰ This article will offer an alternative way of writing a transnational history of the anxieties caused by Ghadar and the transient migrants involved in the movement.

It will also contest whether *fin-de-siècle* anti-radicalism should be seen as a purely American or European phenomenon. The ‘mentality that disposed to see the world in a paranoid’s way’,²¹ which Richard Hofstadter first wrote of when writing of the political cultures of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States, continues to shape histories of American anti-communism and its many antecedents.²² It has become the default position when analysing the long gestation of ‘red scares’ in the United States, which, from the late nineteenth century, effortlessly painted the politically heterodox as non-American and twinned with foreignness, blackness and Catholicism (and occasionally all three).²³ Much like Hofstadter, who drew comparisons with millenarianism and anxieties of otherness in medieval Europe, the scholars who have followed in his wake have drawn comparisons with other European examples or from the wider anglosphere.²⁴ This is understandable. It is easy to identify a commonality of rhetoric in the regulation and mobilizations against the ‘little men on the left’ in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe — particularly

²⁰ This is not a problem unique to Burton’s work. It appears in the historical scholarship that Burton uses to flesh out her examples, which exclusively use fragments of Urdu and Punjabi texts translated into English and selectively use the body of information collected by British Intelligence at the time — particularly Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, and Heather Streets-Salter, ‘The Local Was Global: The Singapore Mutiny of 1915’, *Journal of World History*, xxiv (2014).

²¹ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (London, 1966), 38.

²² William Preston Jr, *Aliens and Dissenters: The Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903–1933* (New York, 1966); Eli Sagan, *The Honey and the Hemlock: Democracy and Paranoia in Ancient Athens and Modern America* (New York, 1991); M. J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830–1970* (Baltimore, 1990); Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America’s Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison, Wis., 2009); Nick Fischer, *Spider Web: The Birth of American Anticommunism* (Chicago, 2016); Robert D. Johnston, “‘The Age of Reform’: A Defense of Richard Hofstadter Fifty Years On”, *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, vi (2007).

²³ Particularly in the activities of the quasi-official American Protective League between 1917 and 1919.

²⁴ Eli Sagan, *The Honey and the Hemlock*; Frank Cain, *The Origins of Political Surveillance in Australia* (Sydney, 1991).

with the anti-Semitism that could place such movements beyond acceptable national politics.²⁵ Comparisons with Europe, however, tend to obscure the colonial origins of the institutionalization of paranoia and surveillance in the United States during the 'Progressive Era'. There was, as Alfred McCoy has shown,²⁶ a direct importation of techniques of control and surveillance pioneered in the Philippines from 1901 into the mainland United States during the First World War. Ralph Van Deman's Military Intelligence Division created in 1917 was borne from his service in the Philippines, categorized radical dissent according to the ethnic origins of its adherents and mobilized hundreds of thousands of white Protestant auxiliaries to provide further information.²⁷ The substance of Van Deman's profiles, at least in the case of the 'Hindus' he catalogued, was dependent on the intelligence-sharing that transnational anxieties, such as that of Ghadar, forced (in this case with Indian Political Intelligence — the British agency monitoring Indian 'sedition' overseas).

The focus in this article upon the life history of Jodh Singh, a single figure, is to write of Ghadar and the transnational anxieties it caused. Jodh was not defined by or under a single 'mutiny motif' — Kim Wagner's positing of a single framework of knowledge that shaped official explanations of the inexplicable in British India after the 'Mutiny' of 1857.²⁸ Jodh was shaped by an amalgam of fears that migrated with him across the Pacific and which intersected with the pre-existing concerns of the marginality of 'Asiatic' migrants in North America. Essentialized truths in India could slip in their certainty as time passed, as colonized bodies moved to areas beyond the imperial periphery and as those bodies mixed physically, intellectually and emotionally with another nation's colonized.²⁹ A focus upon Jodh Singh also allows for

²⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (New York, 1989), ch. 4.

²⁶ Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, ch. 9.

²⁸ Kim Wagner, '“Treading Upon Fires”: The “Mutiny”-Motif and Colonial Anxieties in British India', *Past and Present*, no. 218 (Feb. 2013).

²⁹ The everyday encounters of alienation, resistance and inter-racial sex among imperial (and trans-imperial) migrants, first discussed by Leela Gandhi, and which can be found in Nayan Shah's more recent work. See Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC, 2006); Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*.

an appreciation of the permeable and mimetic nature of these fears and anxieties. They not only shaped attitudes towards Indian migrants and Indian revolutionaries but were intimately connected with how those same migrants and revolutionaries came to see themselves. The first half of this article charts the fears and anxieties caused by the presence of Indian migrants and their involvement in revolutionary politics in Canada and the United States. It then returns to Jodh Singh, and what fragments of testimony reveal about how he lived through the febrile representations of Ghadar imagined by the official colonialist mind and the equally damning demonologies of his former comrades.

I

GHADAR: FROM FAILED REVOLUTION TO FICTIVE NIGHTMARE

Organized expressions of political radicalism were present in India long before Ghadar's emergence during the First World War and Jodh Singh's appearance in a San Francisco courtroom. As Harald Fischer-Tiné has argued, it is incorrect to assume that the First World War was alone in destabilizing perceptions of the benefits and capabilities of European modernity for the colonized of Africa and Asia.³⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru later recalled that one of his earliest political memories was his excitement at reading of Japanese victories in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5.³¹ And, even if members of nascent revolutionary organizations in India did not follow daily war reportage quite as scrupulously as the young Nehru, the final Japanese victory and its symbolic humbling of white prestige contributed to a new climate of anti-imperial possibilities. From 1905, opposition emerged within the Indian National Congress to the 'moderate' position of couching demand in the myths of British liberty or fair play and the hope of winning support from British Liberals or the Labour movement:

The Old party believes in appealing to the British nation and we do not. That being our position it logically follows we must have some other

³⁰ Harald Fischer-Tiné, 'Indian Nationalism and the "World Forces": Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War', *Journal of Global History*, ii (2007), 326–7.

³¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New York, 1941), 29–30.

method. There is another alternative . . . We are not armed, and there is no necessity for arms either. We have a stronger weapon, a political weapon, in boycott.³²

The 'New Party' — led by the troika of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal or 'Lal-Bal-Pal' — saw their rhetoric tested in the Swadeshi movement in Bengal; a movement which emerged to resist the administrative division of the Province of Bengal for purely political purposes,³³ and which metamorphosed, after July 1905, into the mass boycott and burning of foreign (British) goods.

The growing dissatisfaction with the line that separated illegitimate from legitimate activity in Swadeshi, violence from non-violence, created a demand for even more radical action. Secret societies were formed among young, urban, educated, high-caste, male elites promoting revolutionary terrorism. These arose mainly in Bengal in Eastern India — the Anushilan Samiti (Self-Culture Association) in 1902 and then the Dhaka Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar (New Era) group from 1905–6 — but not exclusively so. Parallels can be found in western India in the Bombay Presidency, where V. D. Savarkar helped to form the Mitra Mela (Band of Friends) in 1900 and Abhinav Bharat (Young India) in 1904. All these groups held an intellectual-romantic attachment to the ideal of the secret society — often basing their neophyte organizations on Russian nihilists (or rather depictions of Russian nihilists in late Victorian British publications).³⁴ And, all advocated the use of robberies or dacoities to secure funds clandestinely, and of political

³² Bal Gangadhar Tilak, 'Tenets of the New Party', Calcutta, 2 Jan. 1907, in *Bal Gangadhar Tilak, His Writings and Speeches. Appreciation by Babu Aurobindo Ghose* (Madras, 1922), 56–64.

³³ Herbert Hope Risley, who was, at the time, Home Secretary and a member of the Viceroy's Council, commented that 'Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull in several different ways. That is perfectly true and one of the merits of the scheme . . . It is not altogether easy to reply in a despatch which is sure to be published without disclosing the fact that in this scheme as in the matter of the amalgamation of Berar to the Central Provinces one of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule'. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885–1947* (New Delhi, 1983), 107.

³⁴ Both Jatindranath Banerji, one of the founders of the original Anushilan Samiti, and Savarkar are known to have devoured the two volumes of Thomas Frost's *The Secret Societies of European Revolution, 1776–1876* (London, 1876), and strived to model their own societies on the Russian nihilists of the 1860s (or rather how Frost depicted them). See Amit Kumar Gupta, 'Nationalist Revolutionism in India, 1897–1938', in Maya Gupta and Amit Kumar Gupta (eds.), *Defying Death: Struggles Against Imperialism and Feudalism* (New Delhi, 2001), 40–1.

assassinations as a means of initiating political change (most notably the assassination of Sir William Hutt Curzon Wylie, aide-de-camp to the Secretary of State for India, in London on 1 July 1909³⁵ and the near escape of Lord Hardinge, Viceroy of India, during the Delhi Durbar of 23 December 1912). The wealth and social status of the men involved enabled the very earliest of revolutionary societies to have an international dimension. As youthful revolutionaries became students or businessmen abroad, they met and attached themselves to older Indian emigrés who were themselves moving seamlessly through the radical movements of their time: Clan na Gael (Shyamji Khrisnavarma and Taraknath Das), British suffragettes and the Stuttgart Conference of the Second International (Bhikaiji Rustom Cama and Sardarsinh Rawabhai Rana), and the Industrial Workers of the World (Lala Har Dayal).

During the First World War, the engine of revolutionary activity shifted from cosmopolitan elites in India to semi-permanent communities of migrant labourers abroad. The largest proportion of these came from Punjab in north-west India and were largely (although not exclusively) Sikh. Emigration from Punjab, from communities that were colonized but favoured with British patronage after the 'Mutiny' of 1857, was a product of British imperialism. It was dependent on constant British neuroses of the fragility of the Empire and of imminent, colonial collapse. The Sikh policeman and soldier became a staple in settlements across Southeast Asia after their introduction into the Hong Kong Police in 1867, the Perak Armed Police in 1873 (which soon became the Malay States Guides), and the Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Garrison Artillery from 1881. But, other migrations also occurred unconnected with the extreme exigencies of defending or policing the Empire. From the 1880s, men from the same communities and villages migrated as labourers to Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and, finally, logging and railroad camps, timber-mills and large farms along the Pacific Coast of North

³⁵ 'Just as the Germans have no right to occupy this country, so the English people have no right to occupy India, and it is perfectly justifiable on our part to kill the Englishman who is polluting our sacred land'. Statement of Madar Lal Dhingra, 19 July 1909. *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey: London's Central Criminal Court, 1674–1913*, at <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id%4t19090719-55&div%4t19090719-55&terms%4Dhingra#highlight4>.

America (California, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia). These two migrations from Punjab — as colonial policemen and colonial labourers — were intimately connected. A large number of migrants were former soldiers (between half to three-quarters of the total), hoping to ease their entry by invoking their former imperial service and funding their migrations through the gratuities they received upon discharge.³⁶ But the ease with which a Punjabi *sipahi* (soldier or policeman) could become a *chaukidar* (guard, doorman or watchman) and then a *mazdur* (labourer) was conditioned by the effects of colonialism at home. Punjab was on the same arc of rural underdevelopment that plagued the rest of colonial India. Colonial officials were constantly concerned about the levels of rural indebtedness in the very districts from which the Indian Army gained its recruits: 'The small holder is faced with two alternatives. Either a supplementary source of income must be found, or he must be content with the low standard of living that bondage to the money-lender entails. The bolder spirit joins the army . . . the more enterprising emigrate'.³⁷ In 1907, in response to epidemics of bubonic plague and malaria (leading to two million deaths in the province of Punjab), increasing rural landlessness, the failure of the cotton crop and the 'Colonization Act' (subverting previous rights of tenure and increasing water rates for irrigation), Punjab was embroiled in rural agitation.³⁸ The movement gave Punjabis a revolutionary rhetoric and symbology and, through the arrests and enforced deportation³⁹ of Sardar Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai, their own revolutionary martyrs.⁴⁰

³⁶ According to a report compiled by Dady Burjor, the US Immigration Department's official translator in San Francisco, 75 per cent of Indian migrants into the United States and Canada were Sikhs, over half were former soldiers or policemen in the British Indian Army and Hong Kong Police, and all hailed from five districts in Punjab (the largest proportion being from Jullunder and Hoshiarpur). Harish K. Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organisation and Strategy* (Amritsar, 1983).

³⁷ Malcolm Lyall Darling, *The Punjab Peasant In Prosperity And Debt*, (London, 1928), 28.

³⁸ See N. Gerald Barrier, 'The Punjab Disturbances of 1907: The Response of the British Government in India to Agrarian Unrest', *Modern Asian Studies*, i (1967).

³⁹ Forcible relocation to Mandalay, Burma in the absence of evidence to bring the cases to trial.

⁴⁰ 'Oh Peasant, take care of thy turban!

Your crops are ravaged by locusts, your garb is poor;

Famine has taken its toll, your family mourn, Oh Turbaned One!

(cont. on p. 12)

The first political organizations among Punjabi labourers in North America arose in the context of anti-immigrant racism. The reaction to the presence of Punjabi migrants in Canada and the United States of America was unambiguously hostile, even though the numbers of actual migrants remained small (between 1900 and 1920 only 5,351 'East Indians' were admitted into Canada and 7,324 into the United States).⁴¹ Race riots, moratoria on South Asian migration, the denial of entry to wives and dependants, attempts to impose colour bars on certain forms of industry, became unforgiveable wrongs for men who still saw themselves as imperial loyalists and British subjects:

We are British subjects, of proven loyalty. More than 90 per cent of the Hindustanees are Sikhs. With the name Sikh is linked up fidelity and heroic loyalty to the Empire A large number of these men in Canada have seen active service, and many among them have medals for special bravery.⁴²

Ethnic, religious and national markers of identity suddenly came to the fore. The search for a common rhetoric with which to articulate their grievances united labourers with Sikh religious reformers,⁴³ and more politicized students, merchants, intellectuals and religious figures who had been on the periphery of pre-war radical movements.⁴⁴ Early organizations representing migrants

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Landlords have set themselves up as your leaders,
In order to trap and exploit you, Oh Turbaned One!
India is your Temple and you its acolyte.
How long will you remain asleep?
Prepare yourself to fight and to be further oppressed, Oh Turbaned One!
Love your country, as Ranjha loved Heer.
Walk with care, Oh Brave One,
But shed all cowardice.
Be united, and shout your defiance!
Join hands and together put up a brave front.
Oh Peasant, take care of thy turban!

Translated version of 'Pagri Sambhal O Jatta!' poem composed by Prabh Dyal to open the largest meeting of the 1907 agitation in Lyallpur, Punjab on 22 Mar. 1907. Numerous, competing versions now exist in folksong and memory (most recently by Rabbi Shergill). [Translation is author's own.]

⁴¹ S. Chandrasekhar, 'Indian Immigration in America', *Far Eastern Survey*, xiii (1944).

⁴² *The Aryan*, ed. Sant Teja Singh (Dec. 1911).

⁴³ Individuals associated with the Tat Khalsa programme of the Chief Khalsa Diwan (Sant Teja Singh, Bhai Bhag Singh and Balwant Singh).

⁴⁴ Taraknath Das, Guran Ditta Kumar, Husain Rahim, Har Dayal, Sohan Singh Bhakna, Bhai Bhagwan Singh, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Maulana Barkatullah *et al.*

(cont. on p. 13)

in North America tried to appeal to the Imperial State for relief; most notably when the Khalsa Diwan Society and the United India League sent a joint delegation to London and India in February 1913. The three-man deputation was either ignored (in London), informed that nothing could be done (New Delhi) or threatened with arrest (Lahore).⁴⁵ With avenues of appeal closed, India was redeemed in the eyes of those who had left it as a space that could fulfil aspirations of wealth and social status denied to Indians abroad. The Hindustani Association of the Pacific Coast was formed in May 1913, uniting the various associations and organizations that littered Indian migrant enclaves in Canada and the United States. It established a printing press at the 'Yugantar Ashram' in San Francisco, and established a newspaper entitled *Ghadar*. The newspaper's name, 'Mutiny' or 'Rebellion', accurately reflected the nature of its content: the desire to forcibly expel the British from India. An Urdu edition was established first on 1 November 1913 and a Gurmukhi (Punjabi) version from 9 December 1913. The versions of the same newspaper reflected the bifurcated nature of its leadership; divided between student-intellectuals and the world of the Punjabi labourer. The former produced a series of articles and publications in the same register as earlier revolutionary societies in India, drawing inspiration from international events:

Oh Warriors! The opportunity that you have been searching for years has come, that is, the Trumpet of War has sounded; the war has started; you lie sleeping here. Do you know what is happening in the world? . . . War has started between Germany and England. Now is the chance for India's freedom. This news is so important that I will give you a short narrative of it. The entire nations of Europe are divided into two parties. On one side is Germany, Italy and Austria [*sic*], on the other side Russia, England and France. War has started between these two parties. All Britain's land and naval forces will be occupied in fighting against Germany. Therefore, all the white troops in India will have to leave. This is the right time for you to

(n. 44 cont.)

Harish Puri provides the most comprehensive (if now slightly dated) analysis of the social origins of Ghadar. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, ch. 1 and 2.

⁴⁵ 'The delegates on this asked for an interview with me. I had a long talk with them and repeated my warning [that their tone was liable to get them arrested]. Two of them were oily and specious; the manner of the third seemed to be that of a dangerous revolutionary'. Michael O'Dwyer, *India As I Knew It, 1885–1925* (London, 1925), 191.

start a war for freedom. You can very soon expel the British from India. Oh brethren, take your freedom now.⁴⁶

The Gurmukhi content differed in tone, placing revolution within Sikh and Punjabi religious and literary tales of masculinity, martyrdom and self-sacrifice:

How have we become short-statured and cowards.[?] Where are our youths who are eight feet tall?

We cowards survive today without self-respect. Where are the heroes of the country?

Today we are called dirty, blackened people [*kale log*]. Where is India's glory?

When they confiscated our India, where did they misplace our religion?

...

You cowards are afraid of death. How can you think of becoming lions in battle?

One hero should stand against one hundred and twenty-five thousand. That is the order of the Guru.

You sons of the Guru are Singhs, and there is much oppression. Where are your lion-like traits?

Oh ye brave Singhs, join together to gather up the dropped pearls. Why must all be lost?

We will fight for India, we will kill and be killed. Cry loudly! Where is your tongue and heart?⁴⁷

From 29 August 1914, up to five thousand returned migrants filtered back into rural Punjab. Some of those who originally intended to go to India were diverted into trying to win over South Asians who they met in ports of call across East and Southeast Asia;⁴⁸ others were arrested in Calcutta or had lost interest in the cause by the time of their return. Those who made it were disjointed and disorganized, often only meeting each other by accident, and even then unsure of what action to take or even if there was a larger plan. Ghadar devolved into unconnected low-scale violence — reflecting the interests of the small bands involved. Some tried to raid government magazines in the hope that they could gain access to rifles rather than pistols or the swords and axes that littered rural Punjab; others tried to

⁴⁶ 'The Trumpet of War: Commencement of the Great War', *Ghadar*, 4 Aug. 1914.

⁴⁷ Poem Three of *Ghadar di Gunj* [Echoes of Rebellion] (San Francisco, 1914). [Translation is author's own.]

⁴⁸ They won over recruits in Manila, Shanghai and Hong Kong. Some efforts were also made to propagandize among serving soldiers. The only successes members of Ghadar had among soldiers were Sikhs of the Malay States Guides and the 130th Baluchis in Rangoon. The Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry in Singapore in February 1915 was unconnected to Ghadar. For more on the Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry, see Sho Kuwajima, *The Mutiny in Singapore* and Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars* (London, 2014).

loot divisional and sub-divisional treasuries, in an attempt to liberate the moneys their families had paid in tax; and yet more settled for singling out local moneylenders and village headmen for public beatings and executions.⁴⁹ More concerted action was taken after members of Ghadar reached out to members of Jugantar in hiding in Benares,⁵⁰ one of the pre-war revolutionary societies in Bengal, in order to gain access to more arms and home-made explosives. A date was fixed — 21 February 1915 — upon which members of Ghadar were to attack Lahore Cantonment; ‘Bombs were prepared, arms got together, flags prepared, a declaration of war drawn up, instruments for destroying railways and telegraph wires collected and everything was put hastily in train for the general rising on 21 February’.⁵¹ Efforts were made to secure support from serving soldiers by former comrades or relatives (some members of Ghadar even re-enlisted into the Army for that purpose). The 23rd Cavalry at the Lahore Cantonment at Mian Mir and the 26th Punjabis at Ferozepur promised to defect en masse; soldiers in the 128th Pioneers, 12th Cavalry at Meerut and 9th Bhopal Infantry in Benares promised that they would do something if other battalions and squadrons defected. It was decided that the liberation of Lahore was to be the signal for a general uprising by soldiers who had already committed themselves to the cause, and an inspiring example for the majority of soldiers and civilians in India who would be caught unawares. ‘The idea’, the Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab later wrote, ‘was not fantastic, for it had penetrated as far down as Bengal and was known to the disaffected elements in Dacca’.⁵²

⁴⁹ After the Sahnewal Dacoity of 23 Jan. 1915, the body of Khushi Ram (a local Sahukar or money-lender) was later found and ‘had numerous abrasions, incised and lacerated wounds, that he had been very roughly handled, nine ribs on one side and one on the other being fractured, causing injuries to the lungs, and that death was due to the injuries to the lungs and shock’. During the Mansuran Dacoity of 27 January, the Sud or loan-shark was not present, so his family were targeted for beatings and his books and receipts set alight: ‘Indoors meanwhile the house was rifled, a woman and a boy assaulted, and then the party proceeded to the Sud’s shop, forced it open with a hammer, went inside and tried to burn the books . . . some receipts were burnt, cloth stolen, and boxes of gold and silver ornaments rifled’. Lahore Conspiracy Case: Judgment. *In re King Emperor v. Anand Kishore and Others*. Charges under Sections 121, 123, 396 and Others. India Office Records, Asia and Africa Collection, BL, L/PJ/6/1405.

⁵⁰ Specifically, Rash Behari Bose and Sachindranath Sanyal.

⁵¹ Lahore Conspiracy Case: Judgment.

⁵² O’Dwyer, *India As I Knew It*, 200.

The promised uprising never occurred. A police spy, Kirpal Singh, managed to infiltrate the circle of Lahore conspirators and police raids were launched on Ghadar enclaves in Punjab and elsewhere in India from 19 February 1915. The movement continued spasmodically for another several months: men who threatened to turn King's evidence were killed, a last-ditch attempt was made at an uprising involving the 12th Cavalry at Meerut in mid March, and a poorly implemented plan was launched to create a Ghadar training camp on the Thai-Burma border. And, even after it was clear that there was no hope for a wartime rebellion in India, the *Ghadar* press in San Francisco continued printing its material. By the end of the First World War, however, the use of mass arrests, internment and trials/tribunals ensured that the Ghadar Party had effectively been quashed.⁵³ A total of 274 individuals were tried in India, Burma and the United States, forty-six were hanged, sixty-nine awarded penal transportation for life (rarely better than a death sentence),⁵⁴ and 106 awarded lesser terms ranging from fourteen years' transportation to shorter terms of imprisonment.⁵⁵ Some evaded arrest altogether and drifted into movements unassociated

⁵³ In Punjab, a host of trials occurred: Lahore Conspiracy Case, Supplementary Lahore Conspiracy Case, Second Lahore Supplementary Conspiracy Case, Third Supplementary Lahore Conspiracy Case and Fourth Supplementary Lahore Conspiracy Case, Lahore City Conspiracy Case, Ferozeshahr Murder Case, Anarkali Murder Case, Padri Murder Case (for the death of an approver in Padri Kalan, Amritsar; tried in Lahore), Mandi Conspiracy Case and Supplementary Mandi Conspiracy Case (in the Princely State of Mandi); Amritsar Canal Bridge Case, Jagatpur Murder Case, the Nangal Kalan Murder Case, Alawalpur (Jullundur) Dacoity Case, and Gurdaspur Arms Act and Dacoity Case. Outside Punjab, but in British India: the First and Second Burma Conspiracy Cases and the Benares Conspiracy Case. Finally, two trials took place in the United States: the Chicago Trial (of three German consular officials and H. L. Gupta) and the San Francisco Conspiracy Case (referred to in the United States as the Hindu-German Conspiracy).

⁵⁴ Transported convicts were shipped to a penal colony in the Andaman Islands. The death rate — an average of 37.65 per cent of convicts died per year between 1910 and 1919 — made the penal colony a traumatic place of bereavement and loss. *Report of the Indian Jails Committee, 1919-1920* (London, 1921).

⁵⁵ 274 (Indian) individuals were tried in the various cases. A further twenty German diplomatic staff or German Americans were tried in the United States. Excluding the Benares Conspiracy Case, thirty-six were acquitted; seventeen acquitted but discharged from government service (the police or army); two turned approvers; two were killed during the course of trials; ten absconded and escaped punishment; forty-six hanged; sixty-nine awarded transportation for life; 106 awarded sentences ranging from fourteen years' transportation to sixty days' imprisonment (the sentences in the United States were far lighter in comparison to those in British India).

with Ghadar — especially the Indian Independence Committee in Berlin and German-funded pan-Islamist movements in Afghanistan⁵⁶ — but these remained small, elite, diasporic groupings unable to penetrate into India or make much impact until the end of the First World War. Those that remained in the United States were plagued by a factional struggle between student-intellectuals and Punjabi labourers — the latter accused of impropriety, the former (not unreasonably) of embezzling funds.

The political life of Ghadar was short. It took a matter of months for Punjabi migrants to journey from empire loyalism to armed revolution and then back again. But even before Punjabi migrants were imagining themselves to be armed revolutionaries, they were already being imagined as such by others. The early evidence collected by John Preston, the US Attorney, to prosecute Ghadaris in San Francisco was full of mysterious letters signed by ‘a patriotic American’ or ‘a loyal American’ mentioning suspicious characters in California; of dark-skinned men gathering in parks and speaking to each other in German, of ‘Hindus’ entering buildings but never coming out again, landladies in Berkeley wondering whether they should open unclaimed packages addressed to a ‘Mr Singh’.⁵⁷ It was a case of pre-existing paranoia finally being made flesh. As the British took an active role in supplying Preston and his staff with more concrete evidence of the revolutionary activities of Ghadar and Ghadaris (largely obtained through interrogating captured members of Ghadar from 1915), the tone became more sober but no less suffused with innuendo and paranoia. Intelligence agents reported voluminously of trawling through brothels and private correspondence of unmarried women in order to catch a glimpse of what kind of fallen character would deign to have intercourse with a ‘Hindu’.⁵⁸ These women were never the target of separate prosecutions but were subject to lewd

⁵⁶ See K. H. Ansari, ‘Pan-Islam and the Making of the Early Indian Muslim Socialists,’ *Modern Asian Studies*, xx (1986). Also, Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*.

⁵⁷ Neutrality Case Files, 1913–20. Hindu–German Conspiracy, Box 1.

⁵⁸ ‘The British Minister tells me that while here Pritam [a *nom de guerre* for Bhai Bhagwan Singh Gyaneel] kept company with a prostitute named Marie Belzie [sic] with whom he was seen in public a number of times; that he also associated with two other prostitutes; that while in Colon he made inquiry for Mariam Graham, with whom he had lived in Market Street in San Francisco, in 1915’. Correspondence: William

(cont. on p. 18)

insinuations when called to give evidence during the trial. For instance, Camille de Berri, a divorcee from Oakland, was summoned to answer the charge that she had stored explosives in a safety deposit box. The questioning at the trial, however, centred upon her loose moral character and presented the salacious accusation that she had been involved in a *ménage à trois* with a ‘Hindu’.⁵⁹ Ghadar existed as a phantasm that haunted the American imagination separately from how it existed in reality. It operated as a fictive nightmare, literally so with the creation of populist thrillers at the time depicting Ghadar as some sort of local Californian parallel to the nightmarish fantasies of India conjured in early Hollywood cinema (beginning with *The Hindoo Fakir* in 1902) or in Sax Rohmer’s *Fu-Manchu* novels from 1913.⁶⁰

Bret Harte [the nineteenth-century Californian poet] said that “the heathen Chinese” was peculiar. The British have learned long since that the Hindu, being an Oriental, cannot help being equally “peculiar”, and it is a great tribute to British persistence that it has labored so hard and so successfully in the good government of a people so temperamentally complex.⁶¹

The origins of this neurotic vision pre-dated the First World War and even the creation of the Ghadar Party. It straddled international boundaries — existing in Canada, the United States and British India — but was realized according to specific local concerns: concerns that Indian migrants were stealing employment (and women) from whites, American fears of ‘anarchist’ conspiracies following the assassination of President William McKinley by Leon Czolgosz in 1901,⁶² the constant colonialist anxiety that there may be a repeat of the

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Jennings Price to Secretary of State, Washington, 30 Oct. 1917. Neutrality Case Files, 1913–20. Hindu–German Conspiracy, Box 2, Folder 1.

⁵⁹ ‘Bomb Manual Involves Woman in Hindoo Plot Trial’, ‘Madame Camille de Berri of Berkeley was Cloak for Defendant, Says U.S.’, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 Jan. 1918.

⁶⁰ *The Hindoo Fakir* (Edison Manufacturing Company, 1902); Sax Rohmer, *The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu* (1913; London, 2012).

⁶¹ Thomas J. Tunney and Paul M. Hollister, *Throttled! The Detection of the German and Anarchist Bomb Plotters* (Boston, 1919), 69.

⁶² This created the legal framework later used in the American suppression of Ghadar — specifically, the Immigration Act of 1903 (also called the Anarchist Exclusion Act), which barred from the United States any immigrants ‘advocating the forcible overthrow of the US government or any other form of government’. Nick Fischer, *Spider Web*.

'Mutiny' of 1857.⁶³ It was given sustenance and credence by the work and writings of a remarkably small number of individuals. One such figure was William C. Hopkinson — a former sub-inspector of Calcutta Police, who migrated to Vancouver in Canada in 1907. Hopkinson styled himself as an old India hand from Yorkshire. The reality was that he was an Anglo-Indian (of mixed race), unemployed and born in Allahabad.⁶⁴ In an effort to find some employment in Canada, and perhaps because of the suspicions those close to him had over his swarthy complexion and that he may not have been quite 'white',⁶⁵ Hopkinson began to plant stories in the media that Indians in Vancouver and Seattle were raising money, printing literature and manufacturing bombs in support of revolutionary activity in India from May 1908.⁶⁶ These stories impressed William Lyon Mackenzie King, who was then deputy minister of labour in the Canadian government. Mackenzie King recruited Hopkinson to explore a bizarre scheme he had concocted to deport all Indian migrants in Canada as indentured labourers to British Honduras (Belize) in the winter of 1908.⁶⁷ Hopkinson soon found himself in increasing demand. He began to file regular confidential reports with local MPs and the governor-general of Canada on the nature of Indian sedition, found irregular employment as an adviser to US Immigration in San Francisco from 1908, and was finally co-opted into the intelligence apparatus of British India (Major John Arnold Wallinger's Indian Political Intelligence Office) in

⁶³ Kim Wagner's 'Mutiny-Motif'. Kim Wagner, "Treading Upon Fires".

⁶⁴ He was born William Hopkinson, to William and Agnes on 16 June 1880 at Allahabad. 'Parish Register Transcripts from the Presidency of Bengal', Ecclesiastical Returns — Births and Baptisms, India Office Records, Asia and Africa Collections, BL, N/1/173.

⁶⁵ According to an interview that Hugh Johnston conducted with one of Hopkinson's colleagues, Fred 'Cyclone' Taylor. Hugh Johnston, 'The Surveillance of Indian Nationalists in North America, 1908–1918', *BC Studies: The British Columbia Quarterly*, lxxviii (1988).

⁶⁶ 'The Indian Unrest: School of Sedition in British Columbia (From our Special Correspondent)', *Times (London)*, 21 May 1908.

⁶⁷ Mackenzie King had journeyed to Britain in March 1908 to seek British approval for the scheme. The reasons why it was necessary, as Mackenzie King articulated in his report of June 1908, was because the Indian 'coolie' could not adapt to the 'customs' and cold weather of Canada without causing harm to themselves and injuring the pride of white Canadians. 'Canada. Report by Mr W. L. Mackenzie King On His Mission to England in Connection with the Immigration of Asiatics into Canada, June 1908'. *Emigration of Hindoos (including British Honduras)*, 1908. Immigration Branch Papers, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, RG 76 1-A-1, Vol. 90, File 536999, Pt 2.

April 1913. Hopkinson remained a fantasist. He developed grudges against individuals who were staunchly pro-British or otherwise apolitical, or figures who were only anti-British in newsprint (such as Sant Teja Singh and Taraknath Das). Only in 1913, after the Ghadar Party had already been established, did he stumble upon people who were active revolutionaries and who had developed networks of support among Indian migrant labourers (principally Har Dayal).⁶⁸ But, individuals such as Hopkinson remain important because they helped prejudice against Punjabi migrants slip from the 'vernacular' to the 'universalist':⁶⁹ from the identifiable and still objectionable practices of organized white supremacism that could still be opposed by some Americans and Canadians at the time,⁷⁰ to the languages of law, state and common sense. Hopkinson's reports were always keen to impress upon the reader the absolute moral degeneracy of Punjabis:

They are unclean in their habits, afflicted by tuberculosis, are addicted to drink . . . The moral conditions in India are infinitely worse than they are [here]. The percentage of such crimes as sodomy, buggary [sic] and prostitution are higher there than almost everywhere else in the world and this in spite of the fact that [there] they live among their own women.⁷¹

⁶⁸ And, only then under the direction of Andrew Carnegie Ross, the British Consul-General, in January 1913.

⁶⁹ Distinctions first made by Gyanendra Pandey. Gyanendra Pandey, *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States* (Cambridge, 2013).

⁷⁰ Such as Joseph Edward Bird, a lawyer and member of the Socialist Party of British Columbia: 'Now gentlemen don't believe all these stories that you hear about the Hindus. I believe there is no finer race physically or mentally than the Sikh. Look at these magnificent men. We see them every day on the street — we are proud to say these men are old soldiers in the British Army — I have heard that remark, and I believe it was a Hindu who took within the last year or two the Nobel Prize for the greatest contribution to science in that particular year [referring to Rabindranath]. Physically they are our superiors and mentally our equals. They have not had the same conditions as we, but gentlemen a century or a quarter of a century will see these men ranking with us in the professions, as merchants equalling us in other departments, and gentlemen, to own up frankly it is not that we are afraid of these men, because they are our competitors, because they are coming here for the purpose of competing with us, is not that the fact? We talk about keeping this a white man's country — and see if that is not prejudice in your heart. It is not anything else but your economic interest which makes you want to keep these men out'. 'Minutes of a Hindu Mass Meeting Held in Dominion Hall, Vancouver, British Columbia, on Sunday, June 21, 1914', *Komagata Maru Papers*, Henry Herbert Stevens Fonds, City of Vancouver Archives, Box 509-D-7, Folder 2.

⁷¹ Anon. (almost certainly W. C. Hopkinson), 'Private Memorandum Re. Hindu Immigration, Particularly with Reference to the Present Agitation for the Admission of Wives and Families of the Hindus Now Resident in Canada', *Komagata Maru*

(cont. on p. 21)

It was an engendered sentiment that was to impact directly upon the treatment Jodh Singh received.

II

RETURNING TO THE INSANE: JODH SINGH IN CALIFORNIA

Jodh Singh fell victim to the neurotic reimaginings of Ghadar. Precisely who he was, or what his experiences of migration and revolution had been, were lost in the reports and evaluations that were filed to prove his insanity. It was revealed that he was 33 years old at the onset of the first psychotic symptoms on 14 February 1918, that he had subsequently smeared himself in his own faeces and had torn his bedding and, due to the severe mechanical restraints in which he had been fastened, he now required 'very special surgical and medical examination' of abrasions on his wrists.⁷² Fragments of Jodh Singh's testimony are included in the final report as a gesture towards some psychiatric rigour behind the court's declaration. G. C. Denham, described as a 'prison guard' who had spoken to Jodh during his months of confinement after his courtroom appearance in November 1917,⁷³ recalled that Jodh had told him that he had fled Punjab after stealing some money, that he had been to England, Germany, and had been settled in Brazil before 'a man who was interested in the Hindoo [*sic*] Revolution went to Brazil and got hold of Jodh Singh'.⁷⁴ The records of a therapy session reveal that Jodh fell in love with a woman in Berlin and that he continued to

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Papers, Henry Herbert Stevens Fonds, City of Vancouver Archives, Box 509-D-7, Folder 1.

⁷² 'Preliminary Report on the Mental Condition of Jodh Singh'; 'Report of Commission Appointed . . . to Inquire [*sic*] into the Mental Condition of Jodh Singh', 26 Feb. 1918. Neutrality Case Files, 1913–20. Hindu–German Conspiracy, Box 5, Folder 1(a).

⁷³ Geoffrey Charles Denham was actually a little more than that. He was an intelligence agent for the Department of Criminal Intelligence in India who had interrogated Jodh Singh in Singapore and had been sent to California to ensure that Jodh delivered the evidence required and to provide John Preston with other 'important papers which should be of greatest assistance to [the] prosecution'. Telegram from C. R. Cleveland, Director of Criminal Intelligence, Home Department, India to John Arnold Wallinger, Indian Political Intelligence, India Office, London, 17 Mar. 1917; German Indian Intrigues in United States: San Francisco Conspiracy Trial, 1917–1918, India Office Records, Asia and Africa Collection, BL, L/PJ/6/1559.

⁷⁴ 'Statement of Mr G. C. Denham given to Dr Ball Re. Jodh Singh'. *Ibid.*

love her still.⁷⁵ And, from other sessions it is possible to discern disjointed memories of previous interrogations and trials in which Jodh had given evidence:

There is something. I will speak frankly now, because I am coming to my senses, and the man says there is a voice saying, "let him hang". I don't care for that. (Auditory hallucinations.) . . . There goes again that light. Who is that in the corner.[?] I won't tell [you] what it is.⁷⁶

These moments of partial insight, however, are buried by the quick diagnosis of Jau Don Ball, a US Army psychiatrist appointed by the Court, that Jodh was a 'Constitutional Psychopathic Inferior individual' — a term borrowed from Julius Ludwig August Koch's *Die psychopathischen Minderwertigkeiten* [Psychopathic Inferiorities] published between 1891 and 1893 and describing types of psychoses that were hereditary or racial in nature.⁷⁷ Other factors that may have contributed to Jodh's psychosis were acknowledged in Ball's final report — emotional trauma or 'prison psychosis', the effects of some kind of infection of the brain — but it was Jodh's 'Constitutional Psychopathic' inferiority that provided the 'fertile soil for the development of the Psychosis upon a Neuro-Syphilitic basis'.⁷⁸ The evident weaknesses of Jodh's race meant that further investigation was not required.

It is still possible to peer through the nightmarish constructions of who and what Jodh Singh was. There are other sources: chiefly, Jodh Singh's own twenty-one page confession made after he was captured in Bangkok on 1 August 1915 and interrogated in a Singapore gaol for two months between 15 September and 15 November 1915. The story that emerges in the confession is of the remarkable heterogeneity of Ghadar; of the liminal spaces — political, intellectual and geographic — in which Ghadar operated. Jodh Singh was born in 1884 in a village in Gujar Khan Tehsil of Rawalpindi district. After being educated to a reasonably high standard — at Rawalpindi High School and learning 'typewriting' at the 'Hindu Technical Institute' in

⁷⁵ Interview at the Request of Dr Jau Don Ball, of Jodh Singh, by Grace M. Hawkins (Clinical Psychologist Associated with Dr Jau Don Ball), 9 Mar. 1918. *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Interview with Jodh Singh, Dr Jau Don Ball', 21 Feb. 1918. *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ J. L. A. Koch, *Die psychopathischen Minderwertigkeiten* (Ravensburg, Germany, 1898); German E. Berrios, *The History of Mental Symptoms: Descriptive Psychopathology Since the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1996).

⁷⁸ Report of Commission Appointed . . . to Inquire [sic] into the Mental Condition of Jodh Singh, a United States Prisoner'.

Amritsar — Jodh joined a gang of Punjabi labourers working on railway construction in Assam in eastern India in 1906.⁷⁹ He was entrusted with two cheques of the ‘value about 500 rupees each’, found the temptation too much and the reward of his labours too little and so ‘cashed one of the cheques and ran away from the place’.⁸⁰ The money was used to finance Jodh’s migration to Canada in 1907. Once there Jodh found the ‘racial prejudice’ stifling. He could not obtain any work other than as a general labourer in British Columbia and Oregon, nor could he return to India — the man from whom he had stolen money now ‘demanded 1,000 rupees’ as an indemnity.⁸¹ So he migrated further to London where Jodh was unafraid to vacillate between colonialist and anti-colonial revolutionary enclaves in the hope of attaining employment. He first applied to be a clerk at the India Office in Whitehall and even met Sir William Hutt Curzon Wylie, the aide-de-camp to the secretary of state for India, but was turned away without any luck. After that he made his way to ‘India House’, a hub of revolutionary Indian students publishing their own revolutionary literature from 65 Cromwell Avenue in Highgate until it was shut down in the wake of Curzon Wylie’s assassination by Madan Lal Dhillon on 1 July 1909. But although Jodh had high hopes that the nascent revolutionaries at India House ‘could fix me up’,⁸² Jodh received little support beyond the advice that he may have better luck seeking employment in Germany. In spite of Jodh Singh’s disillusionment with Canada, the United States and Britain, and the early contact he had made with Indian revolutionary networks overseas, he was not yet a committed revolutionary. He travelled to Berlin, stayed there until 1910 where he managed to train as an electrical engineer, and then migrated to work at an outpost of Siemens and Halske in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil until 1914. In Berlin he received letters from Madame Cama (Bhikaiji Rustom Cama) from Paris — another revolutionary and, it has been suggested,⁸³ the inspiration for the

⁷⁹ ‘Memorandum on Evidence of Sukumar Chatterji and Jodh Singh’. Neutrality Case Files, 1913–20, Box 8, Folder 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Homi K. Bhabha, ‘The Black Savant and the Dark Princess’, *ESQ: A Journal of the America Renaissance*, 1, no. 1 (2004); and Homi K. Bhabha, ‘Global Minoritarianism’ (cont. on p. 24)

character of Kautilya in W. E. B. Du Bois's novel *Dark Princess* of 1928 — but Jodh's reply was that he was too busy to get involved in her brand of revolutionary politics. It was only in February 1914 that Jodh became involved in Ghadar. He stumbled upon copies of the *Ghadar* newspaper among a group of Punjabi migrants in Rio de Janeiro and was then approached by a member of the movement disguised as an Iranian in a Brazilian flophouse:

Two or three days after our first interview he asked me whether I had ever heard of the "Ajit Singh" [sic]. I said I had read in the Ghadr [sic] paper of a certain Ajit Singh, who had come to Paris from Persia. He then told me that he was that Ajit Singh, and that "Mirza Hassan Khan" was only an assumed name . . . One day Ajit Singh came over to my place and asked me if I would accept an important job . . . I said I was willing.⁸⁴

Once Jodh Singh was recruited by Ajit Singh, he became an important liaison between Ghadar and other poles of revolutionary activity. Jodh Singh's fluency in several languages (Punjabi, Hindustani, German, English and Portuguese), the fact that he was literate, able to write in shorthand (Pitman system)⁸⁵ but had not previously been involved in revolutionary activity, allowed him to move without the surveillance to which other members of Ghadar were subject. On 7 February 1915, Ajit Singh instructed Jodh to travel to the German Consulate in Genoa using one thousand Brazilian mil-réis obtained from the German Consul at Rio de Janeiro. Upon arriving in Genoa 'on the 9th or 10th March 1915' Jodh was presented with a passport which 'described me as Mirza Hassan Khan, but a German subject this time from German East Africa, travelling to Berlin'.⁸⁶ After another five-day journey to Berlin, Jodh was greeted by Har Dayal and Virendranath Chattopadhyay — the estranged lover of Agnes Smedley⁸⁷ and brother to Sarojini Naidu

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Culture', in Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell (eds.), *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature* (Princeton, NJ, 2007).

⁸⁴ 'Memorandum on Evidence of Sukumar Chatterji and Jodh Singh'.

⁸⁵ 'Report of Commission Appointed . . . to Inquire [sic] into the Mental Condition of Jodh Singh'.

⁸⁶ 'Memorandum on Evidence of Sukumar Chatterji and Jodh Singh'.

⁸⁷ The 'very dark, thin, tall and handsome, and very poor' Viren of New York in the semi-autobiographical *Daughter of Earth* and the tragic, cruel Virendranath of Berlin that spurs Smedley's escape to Moscow and then China from 1928. Agnes Smedley, *Daughter of Earth* (1929; London, 1977); Agnes Smedley, *Battle Hymn of China* (London, 1944).

— both of whom were leading figures in what became the Berlin India Committee (Indian revolutionaries directly sponsored by Max Freiherr von Oppenheim's *Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient*⁸⁸ to suborn Indian prisoners of war in Germany and contribute to an ill-fated scheme to invade India through Afghanistan):

The avowed object of this society was to establish a republican government in India with the help of Germany. They held regular meetings which were attended by some of the principal German officials and other Germans who had been to India. In these meetings, ways and means of furthering their object were carefully discussed, and the Germans were advised as to the conduct to be adopted. These deliberations were, more or less, of a secret nature, and the most trusted only were admitted. Har Dayal and Chattopadhyay had considerable influence with the German Government and are the only two Indians privileged to take part in the deliberations of the German Foreign Office. The transactions of the Foreign Office are kept secret from other members.⁸⁹

In April, after Ghadar had failed in its goals of revolution in Punjab and the *Ghadar* press in San Francisco had committed itself to publishing material for German propaganda efforts among Indian soldiers in Europe,⁹⁰ Jodh Singh was instructed to journey to San Francisco and assist in what remained of the Ghadar movement. Once back in the United States at the end of April, Jodh Singh was recruited into a scheme to smuggle men, arms and funds to Ghadar activists in Siam and Bengali revolutionaries in India as part of an ambitious plan to liberate Burma and eastern India. Jodh's own understanding of his role, as explained to one of his comrades, was that training camps would be established under revolutionaries 'trained in actual warfare by Germany'. They would receive funds, be armed by German Intelligence and be aided by stranded German officers in Asia, should the need arise.⁹¹ Once enough men had been trained and armed, the intention was to spark an uprising in Burma in conjunction with a rising in Bengal:

⁸⁸ An analysis of this German propaganda can be found in Heike Leibau, 'The German Foreign Office, Indian Emigrants and Propaganda Efforts Among the "Sepoys"', in Franziska Roy, Heike Leibau and Ravi Ahuja (eds.), *When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings': South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany* (New Delhi, 2011).

⁸⁹ 'Memorandum on Evidence of Sukumar Chatterji and Jodh Singh'.

⁹⁰ Evidenced by the statements of Lt William [Wilhelm] von Brincken, attaché at the German Consulate in San Francisco. Neutrality Case Files, 1913–20. Hindu–German Conspiracy, Box 4, Folder 6.

⁹¹ Darisi Chenchiah, 'The Ghadar Party: Reminiscences', *Heritage Bulletin of the History Sub-Committee of the Desh Bhagat Yadgar Committee*, iii, 1996.

The Indian revolutionaries in Germany were happy that the Ghadarites were working in the British Indian Army to rise in revolt. They suggested a big plan of coordinated action by the various revolutionary parties, including the Ghadarites and the Bengali revolutionary party. There was the excellent human material for military purposes in all the mountainous regions that stretched like an arc from the Arabian Sea to the west and the Bay of Bengal in the east.⁹²

The scheme was born of desperation. The one attempt by German Intelligence to smuggle US-bought arms to Indian revolutionaries — 10,890 Springfield rifles, carbines and Hotchkiss repeating rifles, 500 Colt revolvers, 3,904,430 rifle cartridges and 1,000,000 revolver rounds⁹³ — aboard the *Annie Larsen*, a three-masted schooner, in February 1915, ended in disaster. The ship failed to rendezvous with a converted oil tanker, the *Maverick*, chartered to smuggle the arms across the Pacific and the arms were seized by US authorities in June 1915 after the *Annie Larsen* had limped along the Pacific coast for four months in a vain hope that another ocean-going vessel could be found. By the spring of 1915, there were precious few Ghadaris left in North America and the Ghadar office in San Francisco had lost touch with the wider networks of Punjabi labourers in North America and across the Pacific that had existed before the migrations back to India the previous year. Those that remained in San Francisco later admitted how out of touch they were:

I was thus cut off from the comrades and the Head Office of the Ghadar Party [in Punjab] at a very critical time. We were strictly prohibited from corresponding with each other about the program of work. I find it hard to write an authentic report about the working of the Ghadar Party in U.S.A. and elsewhere from now onwards (September, 1914) for the next nine months i.e. till June 1915. But, I did come to know certain facts . . . All this, I learnt by rumours only and picked up some pieces of information here and there in the course of time.⁹⁴

The military mutinies that members of the Ghadar Party hoped would occur in Southeast Asia also failed to happen. Two mutinies did occur in 1914 among Sikh soldiers of the Malay States Guides and 130th Baluchis in Singapore and Rangoon in sympathy with Ghadar, but the only mutiny in the region in 1915, of the 5th Light Infantry at Singapore in February, occurred in response to

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ 'Additional Memorandum for Mr Warren, Assistant Attorney General: In the Matter of the Annie Larsen', 21 Mar. 1916. Neutrality Case Files, 1913–20. Hindu-German Conspiracy, Box 4, Folder 7.

⁹⁴ Chenchiah, 'The Ghadar Party: Reminiscences'.

rumours that the men were being sent to the Western Front rather than their adherence to a revolutionary cause.⁹⁵ And yet, even though the scheme in which Jodh Singh was involved was unrealizable, he nonetheless played an important role within it and within Ghadar. He existed in between the world of the Punjabi migrant labourer and the students-cum-revolutionaries of Berlin, London and San Francisco. He could speak of and to both worlds, and the extent to which Jodh acted as a liaison between different parts and aspects of Indian revolutionary activity during the First World War explains the two-monthlong effort made to extract a statement even though he had resolved 'to defend ourselves as far as we could and not make any confession'.⁹⁶

Jodh Singh's transnational and politically heterodox life were buried by Ball's final judgment — 'naturally of the homosexual type'; 'personality: suspicious (by personal make-up and nationality); servile; a "dreamer" having had for a number of years extreme altruistic ideas, intermingled with paranoid ideas amounting at times almost to fanaticism'.⁹⁷ But there were moments of lucidity in the transcriptions of the notes taken by Ball and his colleagues in their two interviews with Jodh on 21 February and 9 March 1918. Even in his psychosis Jodh appeared caught between the desire to reveal something of his life and the desire to retract any prior statement that he had made:

Q. Why do you refuse to eat?

A. I don't eat.

Q. Why not?

A. Because the power tells me not to.

Q. Why don't you eat?

A. Because I can not tell anything [*sic*]. The same man is telling me not. I must travel again, that's all. What is that? (Sitting up in bed.) Some power says don't eat and Reed —————

Q. Who is Reed?

A. Reed [Malcolm R. J. Reid — a colleague of William Hopkinson] is the man who's [*sic*] name I heard from Mr Doss [*sic*, Taraknath Das], and that

⁹⁵ See Sho Kuwajima, *The Mutiny in Singapore* and Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars*.

⁹⁶ 'Memorandum on Evidence of Sukumar Chatterji and Jodh Singh'.

⁹⁷ 'Report of Commission Appointed . . . to Inquire [*sic*] into the Mental Condition of Jodh Singh'.

was the man who brought the whole trouble in Canada, and that is how I came to know, and the sign says, don't tell.⁹⁸

When Ball pushed for more information, he accused him of trying to hypnotize him or poison him with snakes — 'You are coming again, you are not my friend, again you come, again you come'.⁹⁹ It was only in the second of the two interviews, conducted by Grace Hawkins, a clinical psychologist working with Ball, that a little more was revealed. He confided that he missed his father, shed tears when asked if he had ever stolen anything, and admitted that he feared being killed as a reprisal for acting as an approver (providing evidence for the prosecution in exchange for a pardon) — 'I heard from my friend who was arrested with me in Siam [Darisi Chenchiah] that there were two boys who were trying to poison me but they didn't succeed'.¹⁰⁰ Jodh further confessed that he had fallen in love with a woman in Berlin and saw her still in his visions:

A. They ask me many questions about abusing other people and about helping such and such country and I felt myself in love with some lady.

Q. Did you see the lady in your mind?

A. Yes I did.

Q. Had you seen her before?

A. Yes I had seen her before.

Q. Had you really seen her in the flesh?

A. Yes I had seen her in Berlin.

Q. Were you really in love with her?

A. I thought so.

Q. And you have seen her since you came away?

A. I have seen her.¹⁰¹

And, when asked if he felt anger against anyone or anything, Jodh explained calmly that he was only imprisoned because 'I wanted to have justice in the court [*sic*] of the United States and I said something that did not please the United States Government'.¹⁰² Hawkins's report, however, was absent from

⁹⁸ 'Interview with Jodh Singh, Dr Jau Don Ball', 21 Feb. 1918. *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ 'Interview at the Request of Dr Jau Don Ball, of Jodh Singh, by Grace M. Hawkins (Clinical Psychologist Associated with Dr Jau Don Ball)', 9 Mar. 1918. *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Ball's final conclusion. She herself doubted how much of Jodh's statement was genuine in her covering letter to Ball and questioned that it may just have been a suggestive response to her desire to empathize with a psychotic patient who she found fascinating.¹⁰³

After Hawkins's interview with Jodh Singh on 9 March 1918, he disappears from the archive. An open letter to Woodrow Wilson by Taraknath Das was published a few weeks earlier in the *San Francisco News-Call Bulletin* suggesting that it was Jodh Singh's ill-treatment in gaol after his refusal to testify that had caused his insanity: 'Jodh Singh, a defendant in the so-called Hindu Conspiracy Case, brought from India to be a state witness, on his refusal to testify was so treated in jail that he is reported to have become insane and is under medical observation'.¹⁰⁴ Sohan Singh Josh later recounted the remarks of Ghadaris who had visited Jodh while imprisoned: he was 'the shadow of a man. His clothes hung loosely on his body like rags on some windblown scarecrow. His cheeks were sunken and there was a dull glazed look in his eyes'.¹⁰⁵ Jodh had lost 50 lbs in prison,¹⁰⁶ had pre-existing problems with epilepsy¹⁰⁷ and had contracted some kind of meningeal or encephalitic infection, which together were more likely to have been the accumulative cause of his madness than the racial/neurosyphilitic predisposition with which he had been diagnosed.¹⁰⁸ In late March, Jodh was transferred by court order to the Mendocino

¹⁰³ 'I especially tried to see how many emotions I could arouse and you will note that I got anger, (when he spoke of Mr Denham etc.), amusement, (when I asked him if he was always good), and tears (when I played on his sympathies regarding his loneliness). True I almost had to weep myself to get the tears and it may be [sic] it was just suggestion — that is for you to judge, of course'. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ 'Jodh Singh and His Testimony', *Heritage Bulletin of the History Sub-Committee of the Desh Bhagat Yadgar Committee*, iii, 1996.

¹⁰⁵ Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party*, 81–2.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ According to Jodh Singh's own explanation of his illness to Hawkins, 'Interview at the Request of Dr Jau Don Ball, of Jodh Singh, by Grace M. Hawkins'.

¹⁰⁸ The presence of an infection of the brain is evidenced by the results of Jodh Singh's neurological and blood tests. Jau Don Ball's conclusion is that this was suggestive of neurosyphilis, but this is extremely unlikely. The Wassermann test used to diagnose paresis or neurosyphilis was prone to false positives and Jodh's result was only just positive ('positive one plus'). Further, neurosyphilis would, according to current understandings of the disease, have required Jodh to have been suffering from syphilis for a period of ten to twenty years. See Joel Braslow, *Mental Ills and Bodily Cures: Psychiatric Treatment in the First Half of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997); Richard W. Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind: Insanity in* (cont. on p.30)

State Hospital near Talmage — an institution that specialized in the treatment of the ‘criminally insane’.¹⁰⁹ He was likely to have been sterilized in keeping with the Californian ‘asexualization act’ of 1909 designed to prevent the procreation of those ‘afflicted with hereditary insanity or incurable chronic mania or dementia’.¹¹⁰ But Jodh disappears from the official memory for the next three years and only re-emerged briefly so that his deportation could be approved.¹¹¹ After that, there is silence.

III

CONCLUSION: DEVIANT REBEL, FAILED MARTYR

Jodh Singh’s experiences mirrored that of the wider Ghadar movement: of how it could be constructed, prosecuted and then forgotten. Jodh Singh fell victim to going off script in the courtroom, of saying things that were not supposed to be said and then suffering from mental illness that was probably, although it is difficult to be certain, caused by the accumulation of trauma and underlying illness. His life was indicative of the wider Ghadar experience, not just in its quixotic, international character but that it existed as a fictive nightmare longer than it did as a revolutionary movement. The reinterpretations and reimaginings of Ghadar became more important than the reality. Jodh Singh was a victim in the attempts to make this nightmare flesh, long after the movement itself had been quashed. What remains of Jodh is buried in an archive in San Francisco, but the city itself remains devoid of a visible South Asian presence older than the odd Indian restaurant or Bollywood film.¹¹² The ‘Gadar Memorial’ — the rebuilt

(n. 108 cont.)

California, 1870–1930 (Berkeley, Calif., 1978); and Morag C. Timbury *et al.*, *Notes on Medical Microbiology* (Edinburgh, 2002).

¹⁰⁹ Margaret H. Smyth, ‘Psychiatric History and Development in California’, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, xciv (1938).

¹¹⁰ Braslow, *Mental Ills and Bodily Cures*, 56–7.

¹¹¹ A petition was received from Jodh Singh’s father in February 1921 requesting his return to Punjab, and deporting him was seen as preferable to the continued \$30 per month it would cost for his continued incarceration. ‘Report of 27 August 1921, from the State Hospital for the Insane at Talmage’. Neutrality Case Files, 1913–20. Hindu–German Conspiracy.

¹¹² Most notably *My Name is Khan* in 2010. Karan Johar (dir.), *My Name is Khan* (20th Century Fox, 2010).

headquarters of the Ghadar Party on 5 Wood Street — is closed to the public and is used by the Indian Consulate in San Francisco to store old passport and visa applications rather than as a means to commemorate an older Indian past.¹¹³

The effacement of Jodh Singh's presence is not just confined to the United States. The Ghadar that survives in the public memory of South Asia lives on without Jodh Singh. The Desh Bhagat Yadgar (Memorial to the Nation's Martyrs) in Jalandhar in (Indian) Punjab continues to publish and circulate Ghadar writings and sympathetic histories, and contains the only 'museum' dedicated to Ghadar. But it is not quite a museum in the traditional sense. It contains a series of portraits and some biographical information of men and (a few) women who are perceived to have played an important role in the movement. In keeping with Punjabireligious and literary traditions, these 'martyrs' are often portrayed in death, bearing and displaying the conviction that led to their virtuous death as the ideal *sant-sipahiyan* — both men of action and men of moral, saintly purity. Jodh Singh is absent from the gallery of tortured faces. The few memoirs and martyrologies written by former members of Ghadar decades after the event either avoid mentioning him completely or present him as weak-willed, effete and prone to drink. In describing the journey across the Pacific from San Francisco to Manila and then to Bangkok, Darisi Chenchiah described the zeal that infused all members of Ghadar:

We were ready to believe in anything since we were ready to die, if necessary, in the cause of [the] liberation of India from foreign rule. With this readiness to die, we got superhuman strength and dared to do even the impossible. We were not afraid of failures which we considered as stepping stones to future success. We were filled with enthusiasm and happiness with the noble ideal of killing the modern rakshasas and demons [the British]. We were Abhimanyus.¹¹⁴ We were content with that kind of reasoning. We were filled with intense hatred against foreign rule and wanted to liberate India at any cost.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ The memorial does contain a single hall with some posters and Ghadar-related publications.

¹¹⁴ Apostles of youthful, heroic self-sacrifice. A term that references the self-sacrifice of Abhimanyu, the youngest son of Arjun and Draupadi, on the thirteenth day of the battle at Kurukshetra between the Pandavas and Kauravas in the *Mahabharata*.

¹¹⁵ Chenchiah, 'The Ghadar Party: Reminiscences'.

But, Jodh Singh, his cabin-mate, was the exception:

On the steamer going to Manila, I studied my companion Mr Jodh Singh. To my utter surprise, I found him to be an ignorant and timid man, devoid of any training for the very responsible work entrusted to him. He was afraid that everyone on the steamer, who tried to communicate with him or me, was a potential British spy. He decided that he must not talk to anybody. Even when we were at the dining table, he would turn his eyes this side and that and would tell me that so and so must be a spy. I considered that Mr Jodh Singh was afraid for nothing and that he was a fool and a coward. I could not bear the strain of his foolish fears and discipline. Finally, I left his cabin and ceased talking to him before we arrived at Tokyo on our way to Manila.¹¹⁶

Once in Bangkok, Chenchiah recounts that Jodh Singh immediately went underground — ‘It became almost impossible to contact him’¹¹⁷ — and, when he resurfaced, was found to have befriended a man who his comrades knew to be an undercover Indian detective:

I rushed to his place. But the detective did not give me even a moment to be alone with Mr Jodh Singh to warn him about the danger. While shaking hands, I kept on shaking and scratching his palm with my forefinger with the hope that he would understand the hint . . . But it failed. The British police acted immediately.¹¹⁸

And, after their arrest, Jodh was accused of betraying the whole movement for a few glasses of whisky.¹¹⁹ Jodh was painted not as martyr but as the epitome of the ‘Indian spy and traitor’.¹²⁰

It is possible that that is how Jodh Singh viewed himself. His refusal to co-operate in the courtroom in San Francisco could have been a conscious desire to undo the harm he felt he had caused as he gazed upon his former comrades for the first time in two years. It may have been, as N. K. Joshi, the editor of republished Ghadar writings for the Communist Party of India in the 1990s, put it, ‘that he heard the nationalistic prickings of his conscience, suffered for the wrongs done to the movement and retrieved, though belatedly, his position’.¹²¹ But Jodh Singh was neither deviant nor martyr. He was neither the sexual deviant

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ ‘Mr Jodh Singh drank for the first time, revealed everything to the detective and all his records, diaries, accounts and addresses of hundreds of Ghadarites etc. of Germany and Europe and two Americas [sic] and East Asia had fallen into the hands of the British police’. *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ ‘Jodh Singh and His Testimony’, *Heritage Bulletin of the History Sub-Committee of the Desh Bhagat Yadgar Committee*, iii, 1996.

imagined by his psychiatrists in California, nor the fanatic he and his comrades were portrayed to be by Indian Political Intelligence,¹²² and nor was he the very worst 'spy' and 'traitor' of Chenchiah's memoir.¹²³ Jodh's experience allows for an everyday understanding of an otherwise extraordinary political movement; of the transient migrations that preceded Ghadar, of how an individual could slip into revolutionary politics more by accident than design, maintain an imperfect understanding of the movement of which he was part, break under interrogation, and then later regret his role in the prosecutions of his former friends. He allows us to glimpse the ordinary Ghadar activist that lay beneath the costume worn by 'Dr Zodiac': of a man who was a flawed and imperfect rebel in a flawed and imperfect act of anti-colonial political rebellion. The irrationalities of his psychosis have a rationale that is truer to the stranger-than-fiction story of Ghadar than the stoic silences and willing deaths his comrades are imagined to have embraced both in works of history¹²⁴ and in the martyrologies produced by former members of Ghadar. Jodh becomes an antidote to the demonologies of the State(s) and the 'excess of hagiography'¹²⁵ of those that opposed it:

Q. Do you feel revengeful toward any one? Has any one been unjust to you or unkind?

A. Yes, but I feel no revenge. I want to get my liberty, that is all.¹²⁶

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¹²² Beginning with James Campbell Ker, personal assistant to the Director of Criminal Intelligence in India between 1907 and 1913, and his account of political violence in India. Ker's text was later incorporated into the *Report of the Rowlatt Committee*. See James Campbell Ker, *Political Trouble in India, 1907–1917* (Calcutta, 1917); *Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate Revolutionary Conspiracies in India*, Parliamentary Papers, 1918, Cmd. 9190.

¹²³ Chenchiah, 'The Ghadar Party: Reminiscences'.

¹²⁴ Puri's *Ghadar Movement* and Maia Ramnath's *From Haj to Utopia* condemn and celebrate Ghadar for how far it deviated from Leninist doctrine of the past (Puri) and of how much it resembles an admirable anarchism for the present (Ramnath). See also Maia Ramnath, *Decolonizing Anarchism: An Antiauthoritarian History of India's Liberation Struggle* (New York, 2011).

¹²⁵ A phrase borrowed from Kama Maclean. Kama Maclean, 'Revolution or Revelation, or, When is History Too Soon?', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, xxxix (2016).

¹²⁶ Interview at the Request of Dr Jau Don Ball, of Jodh Singh, by Grace M. Hawkins'.

ABSTRACT

This article is a study of an early Indian anti-colonial revolutionary movement (the Ghadar Movement) through the life and testimonies of Jodh Singh. Jodh Singh straddled the worlds of official imaginaries and revolutionary realities. He was a Punjabi Sikh and had been a migrant labourer, revolutionary, turncoat and approver before being imprisoned for refusing to give evidence in a courtroom in San Francisco in 1917 and suffering a psychotic breakdown in the early weeks of 1918. The detailed interviews and analyses of Jodh Singh's madness offer some measure of intimacy with the rank and file of the Ghadar Movement about whom very little was ever recorded or preserved. It also becomes a prism through which an understanding can be reached of the neuroses that plagued both the United Kingdom and the United States. The desire to prosecute a trans-national and trans-Pacific conspiracy about which they knew very little, resulted in Ghadar assuming a fictive, nightmarish quality in the Anglo-American imagination. And Jodh Singh, diagnosed as possessing all the degenerative qualities of the 'homosexual type' was one such victim.